ALAN HOLTHAM REVIEW

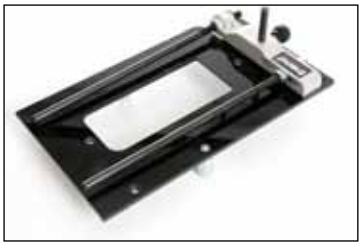
New Trend combination router base

Routing specialists Trend continue to increase their range of accessories to increase the enosrmous versatility of the router and the new Combination Router Base (CRB) looks like another very useful addition. It neatly combines into one unit a variety of crude homemade jigs I have been using for many years, but the real advantage of this jig is its simplicity of fitting and the ease of use.

Designed to fit virtually any router using the guide rods for location, the CRB gives you 7 different functions, though I am sure that a few others will become apparent as I get more familiar with it. These functions are, offset base, router compass, clamp guide grooving, anti-tilt support, offset mortising, multiple grooving, Varijig frame stabiliser.

The jig needs to be set up initially to suit your particular router, but this is a one-off operation and is not at all difficult. Shims are provided which allow you to lift the bridge to match the height of the bar holes in your router. The different horizontal spacing of the bar holes on different routers is very simply accommodated by moving one of the bars backwards or forwards. You can fit any router with bar spacing of 78 - 130mm and bar diameter up to 12mm so that pretty well covers them all!

To my mind the key feature of this jig is the micro adjuster function on one of the fixing rods that allows you precise movement of the router across the base. So you can position the cutter just where you want it, one rotation of the adjuster moving it 1.25mm, so there is no more hit and miss positioning by tapping the base along the guide bars! You now have a total of 40mm of fine adjustment.



The large offset knob can be quickly replaced with an anti tilt leg and two pillars can be attached to the underside for mortising. That's all there is to this jig, it really is that simple!

Offset base. With your router attached to the offset base you now have a far bigger surface area in contact with the work and the risk of tipping is totally eliminated as well as giving you far greater control. My only criticism with this is that the offset knob is far too big and can foul on the router side handle if you are using the combination on narrower material. It is also particularly awkward to grip if you are using a router with a 'deadman' switch. This isn't a real problem though as it is the extra width of the base that is important, I used it quite successfully without the knob.

Router compass. This neat function allows you to rout out circles that are smaller than the router base, not something you can normally do easily. The CRB accommodates circles from 19mm to 224 mm radius. It does require you to drill a 6mm hole to take the pivot, but if this is a problem and you don't want to mark the work then fit a false base with the hole drilled in this. The pivot is easily attached, and when not in use is stored in a magnetic hole in the bridge, I have not yet decided if this is a good idea or not, but so far it hasn't fallen out!

Really tight circles are no problem as you have such a large contact area with the base and the jig rotates freely. For more demanding cuts you can replace the pivot with a No 6 woodscrew driven through the base into the work. Very large

diameter circles are possible if you use the optional rod extension kit which is not included in the standard kit.

Clamp guide grooving. Using the router with its base running against a straightedge or clamp guide for grooving is a common application, but it is often difficult to secure the straightedge precisely in position. It is here that the micro adjustment of the CRB comes in. Now all you have to do is position the clamp guide approximately, then adjust the router for position on the CRB and machine your groove. Simple! Also if you need further parallel grooves up to a max of 110mm centres you can leave the guide in position and just move the router on the CRB.

Anti-tilt Support. There are many situations where you have to work on a narrow workpiece with all the dangers of the router tipping and digging in. With the router attached to the CRB you only need to drop down the support leg and the whole base is then totally stable. It is very much quicker and easier than using fiddly ski supports. You can use it on work between 8 and 80mm thick. My criticism here is that the end of the leg has some form of soft plastic knob which tends to drag on the support surface. It needs to have a highly polished hard surface for a smoother movement, otherwise it is dead easy to use and very useful.

Offset Mortising. For very quick mortises on material between 50mm and 125mm wide you need to fit the two mortising pillars.
The base is then positioned over the work, one pillar either side, and rotated clockwise so that both pillars are in contact with the work to locate the cutter perfectly. Use the fine adjuster facility again here to position the mortise either centrally or offset. If you want to extend the mortise right to the end of the work clamp a couple of extended guide pieces either side and work off these.

Multiple grooving. To repeat a series of evenly spaced grooves the CRB is drilled to take a small copy batten which you machine up to be a sliding fit in the required groove. Make the first cut using a straight edge or clamp guide, screw the batten onto the CRB, then locate this in the first groove and make a matching parallel one and keep repeating for each subsequent groove.

Varijig stabiliser. If you use a Varijig, you may find that the standard stabiliser supplied with the jig is not always convenient, particularly on tight corners. However if you use the router with a CRB on the Varijig, you not only get increased stability from the base itself, but also the anti-tilt leg can be dropped down for even more support. Cleverly this leg is made up of two screwed sections so you can remove any excess protrusion if it fouls on the router handle.

That covers all the main uses of the standard jig, but there is an optional Edge Trimming Base that fits onto the CRB and is designed to make it easy to flush trim hardwood or plastic edge lipping. The base is bearing guided so will deal with straight or curved edges. Once again the large area of the CRB ensures you cannot go wrong and end up tipping the router on what is normally such a critical cut. Although this base works fine for straight or small bevelled cutters I sometimes need to trim edges with a small radius cutter and the close proximity of the bearing to the cutter means you are restricted as to which cutters you can use. If there were some spacers that allowed you to drop the bearing down a bit further then you could use smaller shaped cutters as well.

Verdict. ***This is an excellent jig, its real strengths being the ease of fitting and use and the neat micro adjustment. I can see this getting regular use and I can now ditch all my homemade alternatives! It is not cheap, but it is one of those tools where you are paying for the sheer versatility of use rather than what you physically get, and in those terms it is very good value for money.***

✔ **PROS** **Ease of fitting, Micro adjustment.**

✘ **CONS** **Offset knob too big, Anti tilt leg end too soft.**

Cost

CRB **£69.00 + Vat**
Trimming base **£24.00 + Vat**
Extension rods **£18.40 + Vat.**